

The Forum School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Forum School is run by Cambian Education, who also has a number of other schools. The school is located in Dorset and opened in 1988. The Forum School is a co-educational, 38- and 52-week school, and is dually registered as a children's home. It is registered for up to 68 students between the ages of seven and 19 years, who are diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder. Students span the spectrum of the disorder from high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome to students with additional learning difficulties, but all have a communication disorder. There are currently 58 students at the school. There are 57 students with a statement of special educational needs. A light touch inspection was carried out in July 2009 when it met all the regulations for independent schools. The last welfare inspection was carried out in February 2012. This inspection was integrated with a welfare inspection of the children's home, but this is reported on separately.

The school's aim is to provide quality education and boarding provision for young people with autism and associated learning difficulties in order for them to achieve the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes of being happy, staying safe, staying healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving an appropriate individual level of economic well-being.

Evaluation of the school

The Forum School continues to provide an outstanding quality of education. The outstanding curriculum and teaching promote the students' outstanding progress and behaviour. The students learn to manage their difficulties effectively and greatly improve their communication skills through the skilful support of the staff. The provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and their welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school meets all the regulations for registration, including those for safeguarding.

Quality of education

The curriculum continues to be outstanding. It has been carefully designed to meet the needs of students with the full range of autistic spectrum disorders. The school has adopted a 'help children achieve more' mantra, which is integral to the curriculum and built into every aspect of school life. Through this approach the

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

school assists the students to develop the skills they need to lead an independent life according to their level of ability. The school has devised detailed schemes of work to meet the students' specific needs, based on their statement of special educational needs. For example, the school has found that much of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is suited to students aged from seven to 10 years. Older students are provided with planned work, which is specifically based on their needs, combining both practical and therapeutic elements. The older, lower-functioning students particularly enjoy the horticulture, but currently this activity only takes place once a week, which is insufficient to help them develop their skills. The more capable students now have the opportunity to take GCSE examinations.

There has been a considerable increase in therapeutic provision since the last inspection, which includes speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychological and psychiatric care and therapeutic horse care. The impact of this range of therapeutic care, both within and outside the classroom, has helped the students considerably in regulating their own behaviour and in dealing with their anxieties in preparation for learning. The students are provided with the means to express their own needs using a very wide range of communication methods, which help them to exercise more autonomy over their day-to-day activities. A recommendation at the last inspection to explore how key signs can be used more consistently to assist pupils' comprehension and communication skills has been fully addressed. The school has adopted a range of information and communication technology (ICT) communication aids with, for example, students confidently using an interactive whiteboard to record their names. All students have a planned sensory programme, which enables them to learn more easily by preparing them to focus on activities. This was seen working very effectively with students engaged in a sensory narrative where they experienced a very wide range of sensory input. Students actively engaged in this activity; they focused on it for a considerable length of time and acquired the skill of sustained engagement in a calm reflective manner. Horse riding also gives students confidence and a rich learning experience. Students have access to the on-site, indoor swimming pool to increase their mobility and fitness levels in a supportive environment.

The school provides a supportive career pathway. This enables the students to access work experience both on and off the school site and helps them to prepare for life after school. The detailed and effective personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme is fully integrated across the 24-hour curriculum and the teaching and care staff work together on this programme.

A wide range of extra-curricular visits related to students' class work takes place regularly. Recently these have included a visit to watch the passing of the Olympic torch, Sherborne Abbey and Badbury Rings. Some students have had the opportunity to take part in residential visits.

As a result of outstanding teaching and assessment, the students thrive and make outstanding progress from their starting points. The extremely positive relationships between the staff and students help to contribute to this rate of progress. Teachers

have excellent subject knowledge, know the individual needs of their students extremely well and have very high expectations. The very detailed planning of the lessons is based on a thorough knowledge of each student's strengths and needs, as outlined in their individual education plan which includes their individual learning objectives. Although many students have no spoken language this does not prevent them from expressing themselves through a range of aids, such as the use of symbols and signing, and the staff are adept at enabling the students to do so. A wide range of teaching methods and resources is effectively used to stimulate the students' interest, promote creativity and encourage students to try to learn independently. For example, older students confidently use a range of tools to make notice boards, supported by experienced staff who encourage them to work on their own as much as possible. Independence and creativity are also evident in drama, with students 'freeze framing' different scenarios. Photography was used effectively to record their activities, with students confirming that it had been fun. Younger students enjoy tactile experiences using natural materials and paint, delighting in the touch, smell and even the taste of oats. The excellent use of therapeutic and sensory interventions to keep the students calm and focused enables the staff to assess their learning more readily. This can be yoga, fitness exercises or planned sensory awareness sessions. The lessons for some younger students are currently rather too long, although staff do vary the activities undertaken. The experienced teaching assistants are valued members of the support team and make an effective contribution, for example in helping to manage students' behaviour.

The assessment of students' learning is very thorough. Assessment procedures and the use of data in planning to raise expectation of students' progress and attainment are outstanding. Comprehensive tracking and robust monitoring are being used successfully to drive improvement year on year. Since the last inspection the school has improved its analysis of assessment data, set more realistic targets and made comparisons with similar students nationally. Recently, Cambian Education has developed a Global Assessment of Progress (E-Gap) assessment tool, which brings together all the assessments made from the different strands of education, care and therapy. This enables the school to more effectively track each student's overall progress. This has not yet been fully implemented.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Each day begins with a short class or whole-school assembly. These provide a calm and reflective beginning to the day. Festivals such as harvest and Christmas are celebrated at the local church. Religious education is taught where students learn about other religions. Activities such as riding, art and gardening give the students an opportunity for expressing their delight in the wider world around them. The school celebrates a diversity day when students can dress up, enjoy food and listen to music from around the world. This encourages racial and cultural harmony.

Social education is a fundamental part of school life and all students have the chance for regular social interaction with others, both in class and in their house. Students

have many opportunities to develop their self-esteem and confidence and mix with others, a process which is managed sensitively by staff. There is a high level of enjoyment evident from the students' faces and the extent of their engagement. An older student commented, 'The staff are helpful, they understand me.'

Students' behaviour is outstanding. The school can demonstrate exceptional progress for all their students in managing their difficulties and behaviour as a result of the excellent guidance and behaviour management strategies that are used. If a student needs some time and space to manage their own behaviour they can request this. The effective behaviour management has a strong impact on the students' learning and progress. A behaviour support ICT programme helps the school to track each student's behaviour and any incidents are carefully logged and followed up.

The staff are positive role models and this encourages the students to emulate them. There is a school council with elected student representatives, which has effected some changes, for example in choosing new playground equipment. The school is well known locally and participates in village events. Students take their harvest gifts to the elderly, some attend a local Sunday school and use the local shop. They take part in charity fundraising regularly.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of the students are outstanding. Very high levels of staff care and support and consistent supervision during the teaching day actively promote the safety and welfare of the students. The school has devised and effectively implemented an extensive range of policies which pay due regard to national guidance. These include those for anti-bullying, health and safety, including visits outside school, behaviour and safeguarding. The designated persons responsible for child protection are trained appropriately in both safeguarding and safer recruitment. All staff are trained in safeguarding and a detailed policy fully meets requirements and staff are fully aware of it. Due to the extremely vulnerable nature of the students, the school has rigorous procedures to ensure their safety. This is reflected in the thorough risk assessments that are undertaken for both activities and students. A large number of staff are fully trained in first aid, there is a trained nurse on site and accidents are carefully recorded. Regular exercise regimes are fully implemented, which encourage the pupils to stay fit and healthy. Precautions for fire prevention are very thorough, with a risk assessment undertaken. All fire appliances are checked annually and fire drills are undertaken very regularly and recorded. The pupils are extremely well supervised at all times and staffing ratios are very high. The admission and attendance registers meet the regulations.

Good handover arrangements from care and education staff at the start and end of the school day ensure a continuity and consistency of approach across both settings.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out all of the required checks on all staff and others to confirm their suitability to work with children. The single central record contains all of the necessary information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation create a pleasant environment and assist the students to learn safely and effectively. All classrooms and other learning areas are conducive to the students' learning requirements and do not over stimulate them. There are good specialist teaching rooms and very good recreational facilities. The extensive grounds are used very effectively as a curriculum resource.

Provision of information

The school provides all the required information for parents, carers and others through its website and through written documentation. Those parents and carers who responded to the questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive in their response, as were most of the placing authorities.

The school provides an informative weekly report to parents and carers and a very detailed annual written report, which is sent to parents, carers and placing authorities before the student's annual review. These reviews are a celebration of the student's achievement throughout the year and include video-taped material about the student's activities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a set of procedures which meet the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Extend the range of practical learning opportunities, such as for horticulture, on site for the older, lower functioning students.
- Plan shorter sessions for the younger students.
- Fully implement the new assessment system (E-Gap).

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special for pupils with autism		
Date school opened	January 1988		
Age range of pupils	7 to 19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 46	Girls: 12	Total: 58
Number of boarders	Boys: 46	Girls: 12	Total: 58
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 45	Girls: 12	Total: 57
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 16	Girls: 4	Total: 20
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,509		
Annual fees (boarders)	£136,184 (38-week placement). £186,356 (52-week placement)		
Address of school	Shillingstone Blandford Forum Dorset DT11 0QS		
Telephone number	01258 860295		
Email address	david.keeton@cambiangroup.com; adrian.wylie@cambiangroup.com		
Headteacher	Adrian Wylie		
Proprietor	Cambian Education		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 October 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Forum School DT11 0QS

Thank you for the welcome to your school when I visited recently. I enjoyed my visit. The inspection judged that the school provides you with an outstanding quality of education through its outstanding curriculum and teaching, and supports you very well with your personal development. I was pleased to see that:

- you are happy in your lessons and like your teachers who are very kind to you
- you are being helped to overcome your difficulties
- you try hard in your lessons.

I have asked your school to plan shorter lessons for the younger students and ensure that some of the older ones have more practical opportunities for learning. The school wishes to develop their assessment procedures still further.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Jill Bainton
Lead inspector